

Directing Learning with Google Custom Search

Would you teach your students to read without teaching them to write? Probably not. Educators know that linking these two pieces together makes for a more complete learning experience. Transferring this knowledge into the world of online search, does it make sense to teach students to search without teaching them what's involved in creating and managing a search engine?

Google, the most popular search engine in the world, enables us to build our own search tool. What does this mean for you, your class and your school? It means that you can build a search engine customized with content for your grade level, for a particular unit of study or with material for families in your school community.

What makes this tool even more powerful is that once you start building this search engine, you can invite collaborators from within your school or around the world to help your search engine grow. Now, you're not building a tool that will just be used for a week or two and then forgotten. You're building a tool that students can contribute to and learn from for the entire school year and beyond.

ABOUT GOOGLE CUSTOM SEARCH

Google Custom Search (<http://www.google.com/coop/cse/>) provides anyone with a Google account the opportunity to build a search engine targeting his or her own collection of sites. This search engine can then be shared through a link or by embedding into a blog or wiki. Once created, it can be used by you or your students whether at school at home or halfway around the world.

Let's take a look at one user-created search engine. Visit <http://tinyurl.com/2e25qz> (URL shortened for you convenience). This is a custom search engine was created for the sole purpose of helping to "nurture girls' interest in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)." At the top of this page, you can see Google's traditional search box. But look down the right column of the page, and you will see a section which says:

searches 140 sites, including: www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/Math/, www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content2/preparing/pt4.html, www.academic.org, expandingyourhorizons.org/GirlsArea/, pbskids.org/zoom/activities/

These sites were chosen by the creator of this custom search engine are the only sites searched when you enter a query.

Try it. Type chemistry into the search box. When you receive your results, the page you are viewing looks just like any other Google result's page. The difference is that these results consist entirely of pages from the 140 sites the creator chose.

Easy enough. Now lets build your own custom search page.

BUILDING YOUR OWN CUSTOMIZED SEARCH ENGINE

Building a customized search engine is simple, and there are many options that you can include as you are building. For the purpose of this document, we'll keep it simple, and then send you off exploring. That's one of the best parts of using this tool. You can always go back and tweak what you've done. You can also build as many of these search engines as you would like. Make generalized search engines for everyday work in different subject areas, or make them more focused for major projects. It's up to you.

First, you need to create a Google account. This can be done by visiting <http://www.google.com> and clicking the sign-in link located at the top right of the page. This will take you to the accounts page. Here, below the sign-in box, you will see a link that prompts you to create a new account. Fill out the form, and you will be set to go. In the future, you will know if you are logged in if you see your email address showing at the top of each Google page.

Now, go back to the main custom search page located at <http://www.google.com/coop/cse/>. You will see a large button that says "Create a Custom Search Engine" that will get you started. This will also be where you come to edit searches you have already created. That link is below the blue button.

Click the blue button and complete the form to create your search engine. The form is very straightforward and offers examples of what to enter in each box. When you're finished the form, click the next button. Voila. You've done it. You can now test your search engine, or you can click the finish button to go to your "My search engines" page. This is where all of the search engines you have created are stored. From this page, you can also click the control panel button to further customize your new creation. For now, click on the homepage link next to the custom search engine you just created and you'll be ready to go.

SHARING YOUR CUSTOM SEARCH ENGINE

Upon clicking the homepage link you will arrive at your new search engine's home page. One way to share your search engine with others is to copy the link from this page and putting it on a website or sending it to someone by email. It looks something like this.

<http://www.google.com/coop/cse?cx=005924364887099665360%3Avbxf-mzrv4i>

Yes, I know it's long. That's why I used the website <http://tinyurl.com/>. You may want to give it a try too.

If you want to take this a step further, you might want to put your search engine directly into a website, blog or wiki. You can do this by clicking the link at the bottom of your search page that says, "Add this search engine to your blog or webpage." You will be taken to a page that let's you customize what your embedded search engine will look like. When you're done, click the "get the code" button. You will be provided with HTML code that you can use on your site. At this point, you might need to talk to someone at your school about how to insert this code into your site, but when you've got it in place, users can use the custom search engine from directly inside your site. No need to direct them to that long URL.

COLLABORATING ON A SEARCH ENGINE

By default, only the owner of this search engine can add sites, but if you want to allow others to contribute to your search engine, it can be done.

Inside of your search engine's control panel, click on the "collaboration" link. From here, you can send out invitations to individuals who you would like to give rights to to add links into the search engine. While anyone in the world can use your search engine, only these people will be allowed to add to its content. You can also click on the "basics" link in the control panel to open up your search engine for any volunteers to contribute to.

These techniques can be used by all of the students within your class or all of the teachers within your school to make an easy to use, resource rich search engine.

CONCLUSION

Whether it be a search site built to coordinate on a unit of study or to simply make searching easier for younger students who get overwhelmed by the vastness of most search sites. The Google Custom Search Engine has a lot to offer as you work to bring relevant, standards based resources into your classroom.